

Using Titles and Lyrics of Songs as Warm-Ups

By Gilberto Díaz Santos

I truly believe that pop songs have been a great motivational factor for many of those who have engaged in EFL studies. In my particular case, I started to love English through pop songs. Moreover, it is easy to find people who have never studied a foreign language, but they remember the title and even a few lines of several songs in that language.

Drawing upon the concepts that we understand the familiar better than the unfamiliar and that it is easier to activate productive language skills by using something we have learned through an affective filter, I have been using titles and fragments of songs as warm-up activities. Let me share some of those that my pupils have found useful and amusing.

Titles

One of the many ways to start the class from the very moment of the roll call is to ask pupils to use the title of a song instead of saying "here" or "present." It can be a title expressing a specific idea. In this way the class would begin like this:

Teacher : "O.K. pupils, instead of saying 'here' or 'present' you will indicate your presence by answering with a title of a song dealing with . . . say . . . separation." (give time for students to think) "Robert?"

Student : "How am I supposed to live without you" (Michael Bolton).

Teacher : "Mary?"

Student : "Run wild" (Barbara Streisand).

Teacher : "Johnny?"

Student : "Separate lives" (Phil Collins).

Another way of getting the ball rolling could be to ask pupils to produce a sentence which contains a title of a song. Amusing ideas may occur as follows:

I decided to remain at Varadero beach to spend another **day in paradise**.
We can't wait for you **all night long** , so hurry up!

Love is a wonderful thing , but it takes your whole life to keep it alive.
You're so tender that **I will always love you.**
It doesn't matter what will happen **if I ever lose my faith in you.**
Cuba is like **La Isla Bonita.**

As I have suggested in the two examples above, song titles-like newspaper headlines or the title of any other reading material-can be helpful in creating a positive learning environment and generating favorable expectations of the class.

Lyrics

The first time I used fragments of songs was in a competition at college. After listening to a recorded voice or reading a few lines of song lyrics on a piece of cardboard, the contestants were to identify the title of the song or the singer. This seemingly silly activity made me realize how pupils' memories are challenged and how everyone's desire to score positively affects their quickness of response. Doing this in the classroom is no different from in a contest. Everyone is involved, and everyone wants to try.

When listening to song fragments or reading them, people trigger a reconstruction process in their minds. More than attempting to remember the title or the name of the singer, they try to build up the whole song. Why not, then, ask them to recall how the song goes or to sing it?

After such a collective and joyful start, you can use the very fragments to introduce vocabulary items, explain colloquial expressions, check grammatical items (" . . . if you leave me now, you'll take away the very heart of me . . .") or just establish a connection with the lesson you planned.

Teachers do not have to be up-to-date on the week's top forty song hits. Just look for the appropriate titles or suitable songs that you can use to make the necessary connection with the topics you are going to teach. You won't have to make a great effort to get your students involved because they will find joy in what you ask them to do.

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